# THE LAST SPEECH AND DYING WORDS OF EBENEZOR ELLISTON, *WHO WAS EXECUTED THE SECOND DAY OF* MAY, 1722

*Published at his Desire, for the Common Good.*

N. B. *About the Time that this Speech was written, the Town was much pestered with* Street-Robbers; *who, in a barbarous Manner would seize on Gentlemen, and take them into remote Corners, and after they had robbed them, would leave them bound and gagged. It is remarkable, that this Speech had so good an Effect, that there have been very few Robberies of that kind committed since.*

I am now going to suffer the just Punishment for my Crimes prescribed by the Law of God and my Country. I know it is the constant Custom, that those who come to this Place should have Speeches made for them, and cryed about in their own Hearing, as they are carried to Execution; and truly they are such Speeches that although our Fraternity be an ignorant illiterate People, they would make a Man ashamed to have such Nonsense and false *English* charged upon him even when he is going to the Gallows: They contain a pretended Account of our Birth and Family; of the Fact for which we are to die; of our sincere Repentance; and a Declaration of our Religion. I cannot expect to avoid the same Treatment with my Predecessors. However, having had an Education one or two Degrees better than those of my Rank and Profession; I have been considering ever since my Commitment, what it might be proper for me to deliver upon this Occasion.

AND First, I cannot say from the Bottom of my Heart, that I am truly sorry for the Offence I have given to God and the World; but I am very much so, for the bad Success of my Villanies in bringing me to this untimely End. For it is plainly evident, that after having some time ago obtained a Pardon from the Crown, I again took up my old Trade; my evil Habits were so rooted in me, and I was grown so unfit for any other kind of Employment. And therefore although in Compliance with my Friends, I resolve to go to the Gallows after the usual Manner, Kneeling, with a Book in my Hand, and my Eyes lift up; yet I shall feel no more Devotion in my Heart than I have observed in some of my Comrades, who have been drunk among common Whores the very Night before their Execution.[1] I can say further from my own Knowledge, that two of my Fraternity after they had been hanged, and wonderfully came to Life, and made their Escapes, as it sometimes happens; proved afterwards the wickedest Rogues I ever knew, and so continued until they were hanged again for good and all; and yet they had the Impudence at both Times they went to the Gallows, to smite their Breasts, and lift up their Eyes to Heaven all the Way.

SECONDLY, From the Knowledge I have of my own wicked Dispositions and that of my Comrades, I give it as my Opinion, that nothing can

be more unfortunate to the Publick, than the Mercy of the Government in ever pardoning or transporting us; unless when we betray one another, as we never fail to do, if we are sure to be well paid; and then a Pardon may do good; by the same Rule, *That it is better to have but one Fox in a Farm than three or four.* But we generally make a Shift to return after being transported, and are ten times greater Rogues than before, and much more cunning. Besides, I know it by Experience, that some Hopes we have of finding Mercy, when we are tried, or after we are condemned, is always a great Encouragement to us.

THIRDLY, Nothing is more dangerous to idle young Fellows than the Company of those odious common Whores we frequent, and of which this Town is full: These Wretches put us upon all Mischief to feed their Lusts and Extravagancies: They are ten times more bloody and cruel than Men; their Advice is always not to spare if we are pursued; they get drunk with us, and are common to us all; and yet, if they can get any Thing by it, are sure to be our Betrayers.

NOW, as I am a dying Man, something I have done which may be of good Use to the Publick. I have left with an honest Man (and indeed the only honest Man I was ever acquainted with) the Names of all my wicked Brethren, the present Places of their Abode, with a short Account of the chief Crimes they have committed; in many of which I have been their Accomplice, and heard the rest from their own Mouths: I have likewise set down the Names of those we call our Setters, of the wicked Houses we frequent, and of those who receive and buy our stolen Goods. I have solemnly charged this honest Man, and have received his Promise upon Oath, that whenever he hears of any Rogue to be tryed for robbing, or House-breaking, he will look into his List, and if he finds the Name there of the Thief concerned, to send the whole Paper to the Government. Of this I here give my Companions fair and publick Warning, and hope they will take it.

IN the Paper abovementioned, which I left with my Friend, I have also set down the Names of several Gentlemen who have been robbed in *Dublin* Streets for three Years past: I have told the Circumstances of those Robberies; and shewn plainly that nothing but the Want of common Courage was the Cause of their Misfortunes. I have therefore desired my Friend, that whenever any Gentleman happens to be robbed in the Streets, he will get that Relation printed and published with the first Letters of those Gentlemens Names, who by their own Want of Bravery are likely to be the Cause of all the Mischief of that Kind, which may happen for the future.

I CANNOT leave the World without a short Description of that Kind of Life, which I have led for some Years past; and is exactly the same with the rest of our wicked Brethren.

ALTHOUGH we are generally so corrupted from our Childhood, as to have no Sense of Goodness; yet something heavy always hangs about us, I know not what it is, that we are never easy till we are half drunk among our Whores and Companions; nor sleep sound, unless we drink longer than we can stand. If we go abroad in the Day, a wise Man would easily find us to be Rogues by our Faces; we have such a suspicious, fearful, and constrained Countenance; often turning back, and slinking through narrow Lanes and Allies. I have never failed of knowing a Brother Thief by his Looks, though I never saw him before. Every Man among us keeps his particular Whore, who is however common to us all, when we have a mind to change. When we have got a Booty, if it be in Money, we divide it equally among our Companions, and soon squander it away on our Vices in those Houses that receive us; for the Master and Mistress, and the very Tapster, go Snacks;[2] and besides make us pay treble Reckonings. If our Plunder be Plate, Watches, Rings, Snuff-Boxes, and the like; we have Customers in all Quarters of the Town to take them off. I have seen a Tankard worth Fifteen Pounds sold to a Fellow in———Street for Twenty Shillings; and a Gold Watch for Thirty. I have set down his Name, and that of several others in the Paper already mentioned. We have Setters watching in Corners, and by dead Walls, to give us Notice when a Gentleman goes by; especially if he be any thing in Drink. I believe in my Conscience, that if an Account were made of a Thousand Pounds in stolen Goods; considering the low Rates we sell them at, the Bribes we must give for Concealment, the Extortions of Ale-house Reckonings, and other necessary Charges, there would not remain Fifty Pounds clear to be divided among the Robbers. And out of this we must find Cloaths for our Whores, besides treating them from Morning to Night; who, in Requital, reward us with nothing but Treachery and the Pox. For when our Money is gone, they are every Moment threatning to inform against us, if we will not go out to look for more. If any Thing in this World be like Hell, as I have heard it described by our Clergy; the truest Picture of it must be in the Back-Room of one of our Ale-houses at Midnight; where a Crew of Robbers and their Whores are met together after a Booty, and are beginning to grow drunk; from which Time, until they are past their Senses, is such a continued horrible Noise of Cursing, Blasphemy, Lewdness, Scurrility, and brutish Behaviour; such Roaring and Confusion, such a Clatter of Mugs and Pots at each other's Heads; that *Bedlam,* in Comparison, is a

sober and orderly Place: At last they all tumble from their Stools and Benches, and sleep away the rest of the Night; and generally the Landlord or his Wife, or some other Whore who has a stronger Head than the rest, picks their Pockets before they wake. The Misfortune is, that we can never be easy till we are drunk; and our Drunkenness constantly exposes us to be more easily betrayed and taken.

THIS is a short Picture of the Life I have led; which is more miserable than that of the poorest Labourer who works for four Pence a Day; and yet Custom is so strong, that I am confident, if I could make my Escape at the Foot of the Gallows, I should be following the same Course this very Evening. So that upon the whole, we ought to be looked upon as the common Enemies of Mankind; whose Interest it is to root us out like Wolves, and other mischievous Vermin,[3] against which no fair Play is required.

IF I have done Service to Men in what I have said, I shall hope I have done Service to GOD; and that will be better than a silly Speech made for me full of Whining and Canting, which I utterly despise, and have never been used to; yet such a one I expect to have my Ears tormented with, as I am passing along the Streets.

GOOD People fare ye well; bad as I am, I leave many worse behind me. I hope you shall see me die like a Man, the Death of a Dog.

E. E.

## The Last Speech and Dying Words of Ebenezor Elliston (p. 711)

First printed at the time of Elliston's execution in 1722. Published in Swift's *Works* of 1735. It was customary for a condemned felon on the scaffold to deliver an address to the crowd. Printed "Last Dying Speeches" were a popular genre. The condemned were expected to repent their crimes and to acknowledge the justice and necessity of the punishment meted to them by the State. Swift's mock scaffold speech indicts the recidivist criminal and the government that should have hanged him long ago. The "Speech" contains off-the-page menaces for the criminal fraternity by claiming Elliston has informed on others.

1. *among common Whores the very Night before their Execution:* for Swift a flagitious sign of the reprobate. Compare his comment on the Republican martyr Sir Henry Vane: "His lady *conceived* of him the night before his execution" (marginalia in Burnet's *History of His Own Times,* PW, V.270).
2. *go Snacks:* share the proceeds.
3. *root us out like . . . Vermin:* an example of Swift's rhetoric of extermination. Robbers here share the fate projected for Yahoos in Part IV of *Gulliver's Travels* and for vagabond beggars in *A Proposal for Giving Badges to the Beggars.*